

A TREATISE  
ON  
THE GERANIUM,  
OR PELARGONIUM.



PELARGONIUM.—POMPEY.

WITH

PLAIN INSTRUCTIONS FOR ITS CULTIVATION AND MANAGEMENT.  
ILLUSTRATED.

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# THE GERANIUM, OR PELARGONIUM.

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## THE BEST MODE OF CULTIVATION AND MANAGEMENT OF THE GERANIUM, OR PELARGONIUM.

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THE original genus of geranium, or crane's-bill, included those of *erodium* and *pelargonium*, the latter signifying stork's-bill. They were separated by the late Monsieur L'Heritier, but the vernacular name, geranium, has been very generally retained when speaking of either in an ordinary sense. Indeed, so slight is the difference between a crane's-bill and a stork's-bill, that we do not consider Mons. L'Heritier has conferred a benefit upon botanical science by the introduction of the name *pelargonium*, which, in the sense in which it is used, is a distinction with scarcely any difference. There are almost innumerable species, hybrids, and varieties of geraniums grown in our own greenhouses, so mixed up by hybridising that it is very difficult now to class them. One of the hardiest kinds, and which has numerous descendants, is the horse-shoe geranium, and another is the common scarlet. The rose-scented and oak-leaved, the flowers of which are all crimson, are also tolerably hardy.

Geraniums are propagated either by seeds or cuttings, the former in particular, when the object in view is to originate or obtain new varieties. However repugnant this may be to the systematic botanist, by creating a confusion in his arrangement, it is, and has been for some years, a favourite sport of the floriculturist, who has created varieties by hybridisation almost without end. The process of cross-impregnation, although before known, was not much practised prior to the beginning of the

present century; and so far as relates to geraniums, Davy, of the King's-road, was amongst the first who succeeded in obtaining improved varieties. He was soon after followed by Sweet, the botanist, who, perhaps, created more hybrids than any floriculturist of the present age.

The theory of cross-impregnation was first reduced to practice by the celebrated botanist Kolzeuter, who published his experiments in the transactions of the Petersburg Academy, in 1784. T. A. Knight, Esq., president of the London Horticultural Society, was, so far as we are aware, the first who practised the art in this country; and the success that followed his experiments is sufficiently exemplified in the many excellent varieties, both of fruits and vegetables, which he has produced.

In order to obtain new or improved varieties from seeds with any degree of certainty, it is indispensable that the process of artificial fecundation takes place, and for that purpose, the stamens of one of the parent plants should be cut carefully out with a pair of sharp-pointed scissors before the pollen arrives at maturity. The pollen of the other parent should be transferred to stigmas of that from which the stamens have been removed; and this is easily effected by the aid of a camel's hair pencil, or the point of a feather. The process should be proceeded with whilst both flowers are in full perfection, and in the early part of a fine sunny day if possible; covering up the flowers so impregnated

with a piece of fine, thin gauze, in order to prevent insects, or other causes, from bringing pollen from other flowers. Geraniums, in general, seed so freely, without artificial assistance, that abundance of seeds may be annually obtained,

where a collection is kept. But the chance of originating improved varieties from such seeds is very remote; whilst the chances from that which has been artificially fecundated are much more certain.



PELARGONIUM — DIVERSITY.

Seeds procured by these means are often sown as soon as ripened, and this is certainly the best plan when they ripen prior to July, as they will have sufficient time to gain strength to stand the following winter; but such seeds as do not ripen till the end of August or

September had better be kept till March, and then sown. The soil most proper for sowing the seeds of geraniums is a light rich vegetable mould. The pots should be about five or six inches in diameter, well drained and filled with mould, to within half an inch of the



brims. The mould should then be made as firm and smooth as possible, on which the seeds are to be placed, and covered with the same mould to the depth of rather less than a quarter of an inch; when this is done, the pots should be well watered, and placed on a slightly warm hot-bed, till the seeds come up.

When the young plants have attained the height of two or three inches, they should be transplanted into other pots, in equally light rich mould, and kept in a moderately warm frame, having abundance of air and light admitted to them at all times. When they have established themselves, so as to require re-



SEEDLING GERANIUM.—SARAIL.

potting, which will be the case in two or three weeks, they should then be potted off into single pots of the size of large sixties, or, if very strong, into small forty-eights. A cool pot or frame is now the best place for them, when plenty of water, air, and light may be supplied to them. Some will show flowers in pots of this size, but those

that are expected to be the best should be encouraged in growth by repeated potting, in order that they may become strong, and produce their flowers in the fullest perfection. Such as are of inferior pretensions are to be planted out in the borders to take their chance, but the most promising are to be retained in pots, and placed in the greenhouse.

All the shrubby kinds of geraniums, which are generally kept in greenhouses, require a rich loamy soil; that is, about half very rotten dung, and half sandy loam, in order to make them produce fine flowers. When the flowering season is over, the plants are cut down, and cuttings made from them. When these have struck, they are potted in compost of vegetable mould and sand, and kept in this soil till February or March, when they are repotted in rich soil for flowering. When the plants are wished to flower particularly well, they are put into hotbeds after repotting in February or March, to bring them forward; and they are tied down to little sticks placed round the pot, to keep them bushy. Some gardeners throw away the old plants, as soon as they have made the cuttings; but others take the plants out of their pots, and, shaking the earth from them, cut the roots, and repot the plants in smaller pots, or tie them up by the roots, and hang them in a cellar, till the time for repotting in the spring. Some persons, after taking them out of the pots, lay them in rows in a cellar, and cover the roots with sand till February, when they are repotted, and placed in a hotbed to start them, as the gardeners call it; that is, to make them begin to grow. No plant has been more improved than the geranium is by the new system of rough potting, and mixing the soil with charcoal. According to the old plan, the loamy soil in which the geraniums were planted soon caked together, and became so hard, as to be alike impervious to water and air. When this is the case, the plants being deprived of their proper supply of carbon, become weak, and are more disposed to produce stems and leaves than flowers.

By the system of rough potting, on the contrary, air and water are admitted freely to the roots; the consequence of which is, that the plants are compact in shape, and covered with splendid flowers. Geraniums require a great deal of air,

and when about to flower, they should have a great deal of water; but at other seasons very little. They are killed with the frost, and they are very liable to drop off if watered too much, and not allowed sufficient air in winter. Air is actually indispensable to their growth and beauty.

Among the best cultivators of this beautiful flower, there is a diversity of opinion as to the best mode of treatment. Among the first of this class is a gentleman, for whose opinion we entertain the highest respect. He says—

They always succeeded best when grown in a house apart from other plants, and placed upon a stage as near to the glass as circumstances will admit; being thus placed is a most essential point in their culture. Where a greenhouse is of necessity appropriated to other classes of plants, then it is best to have pit frames to grow the pelargoniums until the blooming season, and when the flower stems have pushed about half their length, to introduce the plants into the greenhouse for blooming. When they are in the greenhouse, and the petals are bursting the calyx, the temperature must be kept high, and be kept so till blooming is over; if it be desired to have large and bold flowers, this attention is very necessary, and though at a hot season of the year, the house should be kept closed in a great degree, using a canvas shade when the mid-day sun is intense. This mode of treatment with blooming plants is the principal reason of the flowers exhibited by the London growers being generally so superior in size to any that are ever seen in the country.

Having thus premised as to situation, I shall commence with observations on culture at the period of propagation.

About the middle of July, the cuttings are taken off and inserted in loam and leaf mould, then placed in a cool frame, plunged to the rim, which is kept pretty close, and shaded from the sun. Sometimes instead of being inserted in pots,

the cuttings are inserted upon the bed; the latter is especially the case when a considerable number is required.

As soon as the cuttings are rooted, they are carefully removed, so as to retain the new roots, and potted separately into what are termed forty-eight sized pots in a compost of equal parts of well enriched loam and sandy peat. After potting, they are placed in a warm situation in the open air, where they can be shaded for a short time, till they can bear the sun, after which they are fully exposed. Where there are frames in which to place them, the facility for readily shading is afforded. Some of the extensive growers have boards a foot or so deep, placed along the sides, at about five feet apart, and have hoops over, so as to throw mass over for shading, protection from excessive wet, or to afford security against a sudden frost in autumn.

About the last week in September, the plants are usually removed into the house or cool frame, where they are placed as near the glass as circumstances will admit of. When fire heat is required, its application is only so as to keep the temperature of the house at about 40 deg., and whenever admissible by day, to give all that can be, so that the frost is kept out.

In the first week in February the plants are repotted into twenty-fours, or if there be any very vigorous, into sixteens, a liberal drainage is given, and a compost is used, consisting of one half of well enriched loamy soil, the other leaf mould and sandy peat. When potting, the heads of the shoots are pinched off, to induce the protection of lateral ones, and cause the plants to become bushy. After this potting, the temperature of the house is increased for about three weeks, so as to stimulate the roots immediately to push afresh, as well as to obtain an early supply of new shoots.

At the end of March, the plants are carefully examined, and very freely thinned of the lateral shoots, and a re-

gular distribution retained. In order to have the plant uniform in growth, a small stiek is put to each shoot, to which it is secured, and the arrangements made so as to be uniform. Those plants that fill the pots with roots require shifting into larger, and they are carefully done, keeping the balls entire, as in the former potting.

About the end of April, or the first week in May, the plants are looked over again, and a considerable thinning of the shoots again takes place, leaving the most vigorous ones for blooming. A careful attention is always given to the watering of the plants, to prevent flagging. Where there is the opportunity, and superior specimens are desired, liquid manure is occasionally given; the plants, too, are frequently syringed over the tops. When the green fly makes its appearance, either the house is smoked, or diluted tobacco water is syringed over the plants, which effectually destroys the insect. Plants thus attended to, become fine specimens, blooming profusely and vigorously.

When the blooming season is over, the plants are headed down, so as to leave each shoot about three inches long. As soon as they have pushed shoots about two inches long, they are repotted; the old soil is nearly all shaken off the roots; they are also shortened, and again planted, each in a pot two sizes less than that in which it was originally grown. Where there are numerous lateral shoots now produced, they are stripped off, so as to leave but a due proportion. These plants are again repotted in February into twelves, in a compost, as before directed; they are afterwards thinned and otherwise treated, as done the previous year. These plants make specimens superior to the first season in size and vigour; when, however, an extraordinary specimen is desired, the plant is not allowed to bloom much the first year, so as to throw all the vigour possible into the wood; it is cut down as was done to



the others, in order to furnish a supply of laterals, and treated in all other respects as above directed.

Those persons who have not seen the superb specimens exhibited by the London growers, can scarcely form an idea of their superiority over what are seen in the country. By the above attention, plants are obtained of the most healthy and vigorous growth, two to four feet high, and three to four in diameter, unique in form, and so clothed with fine foliage down to the rim of the pot that not a stem is seen. I have counted upwards of a thousand trusses of flowers in a plant of Joan of Arc, and a similar profusion on many other kinds.

I know of no tribe of plants (the dahlia excepted,) where greater improvement has been effected. It is but little more than twenty years since the first hybrid productions of the late Mr.

Davey, of King's-road, Chelsea, were raised, viz., Prince Regent, Commander in-Chief, and then the celebrate Daveyana, but what has been effected since then, both in superb, striking coloured flowers, perfection in form and a mode of culture which it was the scarcely thought to be attainable!

I well recollect visiting on several occasions the collection of Mr. Davey when he was in the zenith of his geranium culture, and observing with what increased admiration every new and varied production was hailed by him; but had he been living at the present period, what would have been the feelings of his delight to have witnessed the collections of the florists of the present day, who by their industry and success have raised the splendid productions which now ornament our drawing-rooms and conservatories.

FINIS,





